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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effectiveness of field-based preparation programs for school administrators. It reviews research in the field, pointing out that leadership, decision-making, and role performance have been the major interest areas. Outlining current theory in field-based program design, the author describes general systems theory as the most recent foundational formulation. The author groups problems and constraints in the field under three classifications: (1) quality of inputs, (2) feedback processes, and (3) the relationship of the university to the larger environment. A mix of instructional methodologies with appropriate materials is necessary for field-based training. In reviewing a list of concerns and problems in the field, the author notes that preparation in a professional field must include a bridge between preparation and practice. He believes that field-based programs, if well conceived and executed, fulfill this need. (MD)

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Field Based Preparation: Toward a Defensible Preparation Program

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The nature of the preparation of school administrators has been the subject of constant examination and critical review since the immediate post-WWII period. Efforts to define the content domains of the field, to identify viable preparation program designs and to develop instructional materials and delivery systems have failed to produce a dominant model. Preparation programs have been enriched but not unified; issues have been analyzed but not resolved; emphases and directions have been identified but none has won general approval as the route to follow. Current developments have not followed the cyclical character of educational change but rather represent a cacophony of proposals and counter-proposals. The result is competing conceptions of emphases, content, methods, and program designs. Specific programs are ultimately determined more by the realities of institutional constraints and the interests of those who staff programs at each institution than by evidence and rational analysis.

An examination of the efficacy of field based preparation must take into account the current preparation scene. It should not add to the confusion by ignoring other approaches and institutional realities or by promising more than it can produce. Cautious assessment is more appropriate than expansive advocacy. The scarcity of resources alone means that there is less margin for error and experience shows that little is to be gained by random experimentation. In order to clarify rather than to advocate, this paper represents an attempt to indicate the present status of field based training and place it in perspective with current preparation issues and thought.

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BACKGROUND

Field based experiences have always been considered to be an important element of preparation for the school administrator. Programs of preparation until the late 1940s were characterized by highly prescriptive accounts of practice with content based upon descriptions of "current best practice." If theory or conceptual materials were employed, they were based upon a scientific management tradition (Frederick Taylor, Henry Gantt et al.; translated to educational administration by Ellwood Cubberly, Ward Reeder and others). The "show and tell" mode of instruction was usually accompanied by visits to schools, guest appearances of practicing administrators and the preparation of model budgets, schedules, outlines of procedures and the like. Larger school districts (Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Portland) provided "junior executive" programs linked with local universities. Course work for certification was provided by the university while the school district provided their people with their version of how to administer a school.

In 1949, the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) was formed, and out of it the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) became the group to foster seminal thought about the field. Prior to these organizations, the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) published yearbooks at various times which dealt with the science of educational administration, and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) provided a section for administration. A significant movement, fostered by the attraction of funding and publishing outlets of these organizations, provided the means to build a research capability within universities which would support a scholarly effort.

Within the movement to build a scholarly foundation to the field, two important, large scale projects were carried out. In 1956, Orin Graff and Calvin Street published Improving Competence in Educational Administration.

This book is the report of a project of the Southern States Cooperative Program in Educational Administration, linked with NCPEA, which investigated the normative aspects of the administrator's role. In 1962, John Hemphill, Daniel Griffiths and Norman Frederiksen published Administrative Performance and Personality which attempted to analyze the relationship between personality variables and performance variables. This latter project explored the personal rather than the normative aspects of administration. However, its major contribution was the development of the first comprehensive set of integrated simulation exercises based upon actual problems comfronting school administrators.

Between these two projects the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), in 1960, launched a major effort to install the internship as a regular element of preparation programs. This project highlighted the need for field experience in the preparation of school administrators and focused upon the conditions and arrangements for providing an adequate field based experience. The project exposed some of the principal conditions which need to be addressed if the "field" is to be used as a resource in preparation programs. Following this project, Dan Lortie (UCEA, 1968) addressed the problems of the internship and tangentially the larger question of the place of field based experience in preparation programs. Basically, Lortie argues for the need for field based experiences but castigates the conditions under which it is provided.

The research effort in the field of educational administration during the 1960s and 70s borrowed heavily from the social and behavioral sciences in order to obtain a conceptual base. By far the major areas of interest were: leadership, decision making and role performance. Literally thousands of such studies have been carried out. The latter, studies of role performance, have contributed to a delineation of basic content of role which is useful in domain definition.

Administrative Role Domains. Domain definition has employed three schema: function, process and foundational theories. The following list is representative of the elements employed by studies dealing with content of the role. Some have attempted to describe competent behavior in terms of stereotypical/personalistic behavior required in the role. However, most characterize competent behavior in conventional role terms represented by one of the three columns.

Process	Functions	Theories
Planning	Instruction	Social systems
Organizing	Supervision	Role
Stimulating	Management	Organization
Communicating	Staff Personnel	Decision
Coordinating	Student Personnel	Leadership
Evaluating	Finance	Systems
	Comm. Relations	Value

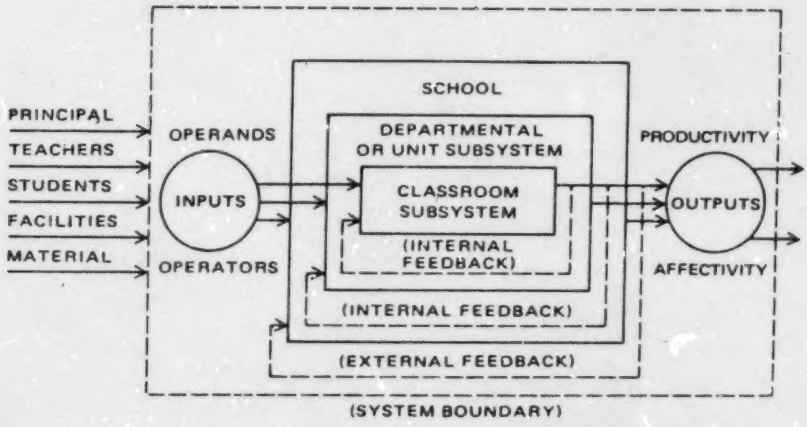
Situational Role Definition. Research on leadership has needed to account for situational as well as individual factors and has tended to employ some variation(s) of a contingency model. The well known "initiating structure" and "consideration" dimensions (Ohio State), the "nomothetic" and "ideographic" dimensions (University of Chicago) and the leadership style versus "leader position power," "group structure" and "task definition" (University of Illinois) are dominant contingency models.

Decision-making Behavior. The Hemphill, Griffiths, Fredricksen simulation effort provided a means for analyzing decision-making behavior of administrators. Categories identified from this and other research are the basis of the twelve dimensions examined in the NASSP Assessment Center which also employs the same simulation techniques. The simulation provides a unique means to standardize and control situational variables so that only individual-personal characteristics are being evaluated.

CURRENT THEORY AND FIELD-BASED PROGRAM DESIGN

General systems theory is the most recent foundational formulation

(Encyclopedia of Education 1971, pp. 77-81). General systems theory is holistic, methodical and integrative. It is concerned with environments, structures,organizational boundaries, inputs, processes, outputs and feed back. It is particularly relevant to identification of objectives, development and utilization of content and materials, procedures and participants that affect both processes (modes) and outputs of preparation programs. Lipham and Hoeh (1974) provide the following schema of a general system theory application to program design.



From: James Lipham and James Hoch, Jr., The Principalship: Foundations and Functions. New York: Harper and Row, 1974, p. 34.

The Lipham and Hoeh schema could be employed to include field-based inputs and sub-systems and to identify outputs for measurement and analysis. Any consideration of field-based preparation would need to include:

1) Determination of needs and program goals,

2) Identification of requisite inputs,

3) Specification of domains of role behavior

4) Provision of individualized, field based experiences, and

5) Evaluation and certification of performance behaviors.

An expanded statement descriptive of the Lipham and Hoeh schema would be somewhat as follows: students (operands), professors and practitioners (operators), campus and school facilities, materials and field situations constitute basic inputs to the system. University and specified field sites comprise the training area (institution). The use of systematic procedures, the structured sub-systems and the processes of instruction and relationships deal with the inputs. The output of the system is professional personnel who can perform effectively in the administrative positions in education.

PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINTS

Field based programs in educational administration have had serious problems. These problems and constraints would be classified by the schema. They are: 1) quality of inputs, 2) feedback processes between sub-systems and 3) the relationship of the university to the larger environment. Each of these elements would need to be thoroughly examined by each institution.

Quality of inputs. Inputs include the quality of the potential administrator in training, the practitioner as trainer and the facilities and materials available in the field. McCleary (CCBC Notebook, 1978) examined the problems attendant to the trainee and the practitioner as trainer. The identification of the trainee with the school district-allegiance, motivation and orientation to district values - often mitigate those characteristics necessary for dispassionate professional study. Likewise, the practitioner as trainer often presents the training institution with problems attendent to the daily pressures of work and the narrowness of perspective to immediate district needs to say nothing of time and energy to devote to the trainee.

In the matter of both of these input problems, the NASSP Assessment Center provides a unique vehicle for problem resolution. Trainees who have been screened by the Center and administrators who have been licensed as assessors become a prime source for determining the quality of the trainee and an objective assessment of trainee needs. Likewise, the practitioner who is also a qualified assessor, when fully supported by the district, has a different orientation to training and a commitment not easily obtained in a professor-administrator negotiation over the provision of training experiences.

Inputs relating to facilities and materials--including the nature of field experiences remains a problem. A trainee needing to experience problem analysis, gain a competence in sensitivity or test educational values may have difficulty accomplishing this in a deliberate, systematic way. It is for this reason that special attention to the developmental component of field-based preparation is essential.

Feed-back processes between sub-systems. Other sources (Andrews, Lortie, among others) cite the problems of sharing information, arriving at decisions and coordinating effort as primary concerns within and between sub-systems in dealing with field-based programs. The idiosyncratic nature of the inter personal relationships at any one site and the traditional character of relationships across sub-systems make this a difficult area with which to deal in the abstract. Perhaps problems can be anticipated by participants from institutions as planning goes forward and experiences shared as programs are carried out. Such a sharing could be a useful by-product of a Consortium of Institutions.

Relationship of the University to the Larger Environment. The primary University role in field based training is that of legitimating the preparation of administrators. The measurement of competence is critical to this function and hence assessment and the uses of the Assessment Center are important in field based programs. All of the questions pertinent to performance evaluation

occur at this stage: What objectives? What levels of attainment? What instruments and procedures for measurement attainment? What criteria to judge attainment? Who judges?

The political problems become apparent whenever evaluation responsibilities are shared. A level of performance in a given setting (practitioner) may not be judged as satisfactory in general (professor). The generalizability of evaluation data, as well as other questions, may be ameliorated by the use of the Assessment Center. However, the full range of relationships of the university with the environment requires detailed attention and the ultimate problem of performance evaluation is a useful means to work backward to examine: objectives, instructional programming, methodologies of instruction, student selection, evaluation and entry into the field. Field based training presents challenges to traditional controls. Therefore, care should be taken in the arena of university relationships with careful identification of problems and the creation of problem resolution procedures.

Instruction

Instruction presents problems in field based preparation not found in conventional course offerings. First, the typical quarter or semester hour course offering with pre-arranged meeting times, beginning and ending dates, teach-test format and instruction geared to familiarity and understanding levels of attainment of cognitive material does not accommodate the development of personal competencies (al a Griffiths et al.) at an application level of performance. This is true particularly when such instruction requires field based experiences.

Second, the programming of field based training to assure that experiences contribute to learner needs in an efficient manner is very difficult to manage.

To acquire skills in conflict resolution, for example, might require inordinate amounts of "stand-by" time until opportunity for such experiences become available. Multiple learner needs might make use of some "stand-by" time. However, the problem of matching needs to experiences is considerable and is not of the same order as encountered in counseling centers, businesses and teaching hospitals. Further, the time commitment of the practitioner to the programming of instruction is questionable at best, as already noted.

Third, the availability of materials to support field based preparation and the delivery of concomitant instruction remains. A Consortium could, with expectation of considerable success, use the field for development and field testing of materials. Cases, simulations, modules and other forms of instructional materials could be produced if a sound R&D model for such work was shared within a consortium. Again, a caution needs to be faced that this type of effort is costly in time and funds, if done well, and it may not be recognized as high priority work within the university. This author, for example, headed a project to develop and field test individualized learning models costing over a quarter million dollars. However, little recognition was accorded those who developed modules and assisted in field testing by their universities even though the project was given national citations for excellence.

A mix of instructional methodologies with appropriate materials is necessary to field based training. There is the too common practice, particularly in the internship, of conceiving the experience to be the content. Rather, the experience should serve as the application or illustration of the content. McCleary and McIntyre collected research on the identifiable methodologies used in educational administration and made independent ratings of levels of learning and type of competency based upon the evidence available. The chart showing these methodologies and ratings of their usefulness is provided.

	LEVELS OF LEARNING			COMPETENCIES TO BE LEARNED		
	Familiarity	Understanding	Application	Technical	Conceptual	Human
Reading	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Lecture	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Discussion	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Field trip	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Case	Low	High	Low	Low	High	Low
Scenario	Low	High	Low	Low	High	Low
Individualized instructional package	Low	High	Low	Low	High	Low
Computer-assisted instruction	Low	High	Low	Low	High	Low
Tutorial	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Student research	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Laboratory approach	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Gaming	Low	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Simulation	Low	High	High	High	High	Medium
Human relations training	Low	High	High	High	High	High
Clinical study	Low	High	High	High	High	Medium
Team research	Low	High	High	High	Medium	Low
Internship	Low	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium

High, Medium, Low = Extent to which the method, when competently employed, tends to be practical and effective in learning the designated skills at the levels desired.

From the chart it can be seen that reading, lecture and discussion might be more appropriate at early stages of attainment of a particular competency where familiarity is needed. Other methodologies may be more appropriate at stages of actual application. For example, a simulation in problem analysis might preceed an actual experience. At this point, it should be noted again that evaluation of attainment cannot be left to intuitive judgment or impressionistic opinion of raters. McCleary and McIntyre found that evaluation procedures and criteria were often inconsistent with the objective of the experience and never covered the range of outcomes sought. Here again, the Assessment Center evaluation procedure might be adapted in order to obtain and rate descriptions of actual behavior.

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS NEEDING TO BE ADDRESSED

An admonition at the opening of this paper addressed the need for cautious assessment rather than advocacy. In this light, a listing of concerns needing to be addressed if quality field based instruction is to be undertaken is drawn from the content of this paper. These include:

1. The definition of role domains in administration do not conform to the twelve areas of competence measured by the Assessment Center. Some analysis is needed of how the three domains (process, function, theory) mesh with the Assessment Center areas and how these would be programmed in instruction.
2. The situational specificity and the idiosyncratic nature of field based experiences needs to be addressed to ensure that experiences are appropriate to needs.
3. Problems of power sharing must be anticipated, identified and procedures outlined for conflict resolution.
4. Questions of trainee and practitioner quality must be addressed.
5. Evaluation procedures need to be specified and the range of evaluation questions dealt with; even the question that some outcomes may not be measurable and whether there might be an over-emphasis on evaluation to the detriment of instruction.
6. The matter of the "fit" of campus based instruction with field based instruction requires attention.
7. The nature and quality of field experience, particularly its programming and treatment as instruction, needs to be addressed.
8. A mix of instructional methodologies might be appropriate in the field based component. If so, what should these be and how combined?
9. The Consortium concept appears to be a useful one to advance R/D efforts. How should this be formalized and shared?

THE CASE OF FIELD BASED PREPARATION

A review of the list of concerns and the cautions and problems noted in this paper might lead to the conclusion that field based preparation is a morass, better to be left alone or to be offered only in sufficient amount to demonstrate an interest on the part of the preparation institution and the school district. Experience with the internship indicates that most institutions have already reached this conclusion. Such a conclusion is a hasty and short-sighted, even dangerous, one indeed.

The logic for the counter argument is that preparation programs, by and large, prepare practitioners. Preparation in a professional field must demonstrate a progressive and direct relationship to the field, culminating in successful practice. Further, professions generally (medicine, engineering, management, education) hold that preparation is a responsibility of the entire profession, a progression from the study of basic, supporting disciplines to field based practice. To conduct professional preparation for an applied field without a sincere effort to bridge preparation and practice, or to do that bridging badly, is grounds for severe indictment. There are symptoms that indictments are being prepared; note particularly the moves to place certification in district hands and to provide recognition in academic currency to district based instruction.

Unless strong linkages to the field are structured and maintained, institutions suffer in several ways. Intellectually, a discipline needs the field as a basis of inquiry. Preparation programs provide strong linkages. Preparation programs also need to be validated. This is done when trainees are successful. Preparation programs need support-material, moral, political. This is supplied when programs serve the broader needs of the profession and is curtailed when they are not seen to contribute. The field based component of preparation, if well conceived and well executed, fulfills each of these requirements.

At least two foci seem to be essential if the field based component of preparation programs in educational administration is to achieve any semblance of rationality and effectiveness. First, a considerable literature is accumulating on quality education, administrator effectiveness and the "culture" of the school. These studies provide findings to be validated and refined and methodologies of a qualitative, field-study character which would be useful in giving trainees a perspective of the administrative setting in which they must function. A common format for taking field notes alone would be of great assistance; prescribed methods to identify problems, assess communications, make observations of sensitivity, assertiveness, etc; and the preparation of a field study could become the integrating experience. One focus then would be a research orientation which would generate data that could be shared and out of which larger studies could be constructed.

Second, an R/D approach to preparation could be undertaken in the development and testing of materials needed to provide support to field experiences. As noted, the experiences in the field are not the content but an application of the content of prior and concurrent instruction. The availability of materials which directly support field experience is now lacking. These two foci of effort could raise considerably the value of field based experiences and feed back into research and R/D efforts to improve education generally.